

Loughborough University Institutional Repository

Lessons from Edinburgh's 'No'

This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the/an author.

Citation: RYE, T., ISON, S.G. and ENOCH, M.P., 2005. Lessons from Edinburgh's 'No'. *Town and country planning*, 74 (7/8), pp. 228-229

Additional Information:

- This is a journal article. It was published in the journal *Town and country planning* [© Town and Country Planning Association] which is available from: <http://www.tcpa.org.uk/Journal.asp>

Metadata Record: <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/3402>

Publisher: © Town and Country Planning Association

Please cite the published version.

This item was submitted to Loughborough's Institutional Repository by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.



creative commons
COMMONS DEED

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work

Under the following conditions:

 **Attribution.** You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor.

 **Noncommercial.** You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

 **No Derivative Works.** You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.
- Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

Your fair use and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

This is a human-readable summary of the [Legal Code \(the full license\)](#).

[Disclaimer](#) 

For the full text of this licence, please go to:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>

UP TO 25 February 2005, the City of Edinburgh had proposed plans to introduce a congestion charging scheme, but in a postal referendum on the City Council's transport strategy, held between 7 and 21 February, the residents of Edinburgh voted against the Council's preferred strategy, which included congestion charging, and the plans for the scheme were abandoned.

The Edinburgh congestion charging scheme was to have consisted of two cordons – an inner and outer – and was to operate Mondays to Fridays, with a charge for inbound trips into the outer cordon from 07:00 to 10:00 and a charge for inbound trips into the inner cordon between 07:00 and 18:30. The charge was to be set at a maximum of £2, based on crossing one or both of the cordons. It was proposed that Edinburgh residents living outside the outer cordon would have been exempt from the outer cordon charge, and there would have been exemptions for people with mobility impairments, buses, emergency vehicles, taxis, motorcycles, and city car club vehicles.

It was expected that payments would have been made through retail outlets, over the internet, by SMS (text message), or through a call centre, with automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technology employed as a means of enforcement. If there was no record of payment for a vehicle, then a penalty notice, set at £60, would have been issued for non-payment. Overall, the scheme was expected to earn something in the region of £760 million, which would have been utilised, over a 20-year period, principally for public transport improvements. A 'Yes' vote in the referendum, in favour of the Council's preferred strategy, would have seen congestion charging introduced in 2006.

The 'No' vote

The postal referendum resulted in a 'No' vote, with 74 per cent of those who voted (in a 61.8 per cent 'turnout') rejecting the scheme. The congestion charging scheme has consequently been abandoned indefinitely, and a new local transport strategy, omitting congestion charging, is to be produced by the end of this year.

Prior to the referendum, an extensive period of consultation was undertaken. In granting approval, in principle, for the scheme in 2002, the Scottish Executive stipulated that Edinburgh City Council should demonstrate 'clear public support' for the proposals, and that further consultation should be undertaken. Edinburgh City Council decided to make the referendum a central aspect of this additional consultation. The conclusions of a public inquiry into the Edinburgh Congestion Charging Order, held in spring 2004, were on the whole supportive of the scheme, with the exception of the exemption for Edinburgh residents living outside the outer cordon.¹

There would appear to have been no lack of consultation, although information

Lessons from



Marcus Enoch

The Edinburgh scheme lacked a 'discernable policy champion'

Tom Rye, Stephen Ison, and Marcus Enoch look at the reasons for the 'No' vote in the Edinburgh congestion charging referendum and the lessons to be learnt from the experience

about the impact on the retail sector was limited. Detailed research and negotiation with the city centre retail community only really took place in the final year of scheme planning.

Both the public inquiry and the consultation process raised a number of issues, not least the impact of traffic displaced by the inner cordon rat-running through residential areas; whether adequate alternatives to the use of the private car would have been in place prior to the implementation of the scheme; the equity aspect, in that the rich could continue driving while poorer drivers would be 'priced off the road'; and whether the level of congestion actually warranted a congestion charging scheme.

Some of these issues were difficult to deal with in the Edinburgh context. For example,

it was not possible to achieve substantial improvements to the bus network prior to the introduction of the congestion charging scheme, although improvements funded from charging were planned to be in place immediately the charges came into force. Furthermore, the level of congestion in Edinburgh is more a matter of subjective perception than of established fact. And the issue of rat-running may not have materialised once the scheme was in operation, or it could have been addressed as and when it occurred.

There were a number of reasons for the failure to achieve a 'Yes' vote in the referendum, and there are clear lessons to be learnt for others contemplating the implementation of a congestion charging scheme. The following eight facts at play in the preparation of the Edinburgh scheme

Edinburgh's 'No'

are by no means exhaustive, but they do provide a check-list of relevant issues:

■ First, while there was essentially one implementing authority for the Central London congestion charging scheme (namely, the Mayor of London assisted by Transport for London – although MPs and Greater London Authority members were also players), there were a number of players in the Edinburgh case – the Scottish Executive, the City of Edinburgh Council, and Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (TIE Ltd), a company established to oversee transport issues such as the implementation of infrastructure developments and the congestion charge. In London the final decision on whether the scheme was to be given the green light lay solely with the Mayor, whereas the Edinburgh decision rested with the Scottish Executive and Scottish Ministers. There was thus no single implementing authority, and this complex political structure could have made it more difficult to achieve a 'Yes' vote in the referendum.

■ A second and related factor is that there was no discernable policy champion to take on the role that Ken Livingstone played in the London case. The Mayor played an important part in countering the criticisms aimed at the Central London scheme by a number of London boroughs. As noted in *Local Transport Today*,² 'Fife, West Lothian and Midlothian councils had been vociferous opponents of the scheme, not least because Edinburgh had planned to exempt its own residents living beyond the outer cordon boundary from paying the outer cordon charge, while expecting residents of other authorities to pay.' Clearly this negativity required a corresponding 'pro' policy champion.

■ A few months prior to congestion charging being adopted in Central London the scheme had 60 individuals working on it in-house, whereas at the same stage in the development of the Edinburgh scheme only six worked on it in the Council. While this discrepancy in resources does not necessarily account for the 'No' vote in the referendum, it would seem to illustrate a difference in the level of commitment to the respective schemes.

■ While there appeared to be common agreement that congestion had reached unacceptable levels in London, there

appeared to be no such agreement in Edinburgh.

■ Clarity of objectives is all-important for the success of any scheme. In Edinburgh there appeared to be an element of confusion. The overall aim may have been to deal with the perceived level of congestion, but it was also seen as a revenue-raising measure, while neighbouring councils viewed it as a measure that penalised their residents.

■ Simplicity is central to the acceptance of any congestion charging scheme. Whereas the London scheme is relatively straightforward, the proposed Edinburgh scheme was quite complex, largely as a result of the addition of the second cordon. While the second cordon may have been necessary from a technical perspective, it may have been more politic from a public acceptance viewpoint to have developed a staged approach, introducing a single cordon in the first instance and then the second cordon at a later date, once the first had been understood and accepted.

■ Arguably, the presentation and communication of the scheme to the public could have been enhanced. An example of the shortcomings here is the complex nature of the leaflet that accompanied the ballot forms as part of the postal referendum, which was written by transport planners and lawyers who were required to be neutral in presenting the 'Yes' and 'No' cases. Although there was a great deal of consultation on the scheme, there was less active promotion of its benefits through advertising/promotional campaigns until approximately six months before the referendum.

■ The referendum was problematic because not all those who wanted to vote could do so. This was because there is no statutory framework for local authority referenda in Scotland: in legal terms, the vote was simply a form of consultation. One consequence was that those who had opted out of the full electoral register for data protection reasons had to opt back in if they were to be able to vote in the referendum. It has been claimed that these people were likely to have been more supportive of the scheme than the average, although there is no particular evidence to support this.

Pointers for the future

In conclusion, the proposed Edinburgh scheme and the referendum which took place provide a number of important lessons, both for national legislators and local transport planners contemplating the introduction of a congestion charging scheme. A single implementing agency, ably supported by a policy champion, would appear to be crucial ingredients, as are adequate resources. The scheme objectives have to be clearly enunciated. In Edinburgh, relieving congestion was seen as a priority, but the perception among the general public appears to have been that the problem was not severe enough to accept a policy such as congestion charging. This stands in stark contrast to Central London.

Consultation was clearly in evidence, but what was less clear was dynamic and imaginative promotion of the potential benefits of the scheme.

Finally, a simple scheme is likely to be more acceptable in the first instance; and the proposed Edinburgh scheme was far from that.

On the overall issue of road pricing, the debate is moving apace. On 9 June the Secretary of State for Transport announced the Government's desire for the introduction of a national road pricing scheme at some point in the future. The debate around a national scheme will raise a number of issues, not least the type of system, the availability of the technology, and the practical steps that need to be taken. The Secretary of State announced that there will be a need for trials and a pilot, possibly in a region or major conurbation. The intention is for a charge on the basis of distance travelled, with the charge varying depending on the level of congestion. The Secretary of State has been clear to state, however, that the planning and delivery of such a charge will span several parliaments. ■

Tom Rye is with the School of Built Environment/Transport Research Institute at Napier University, and Stephen Ison and Marcus Enoch are with the Transport Studies Group in the Department of Civil and Building Engineering at Loughborough University.

Notes

1 The full report on the inquiry can be found at <http://www.ititime.com>

2 *Local Transport Today*. 3 Mar. 2005